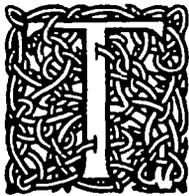


## THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL COLLECTIONS OF THE LATE WILLIAM BLADES AND THE LATE TALBOT BAINES REED.



THESE two collections, which are now in the possession of the St. Bride Foundation, are believed together to constitute the most complete library on Bibliography and the History of Printing in existence. They contain about 4,181 volumes with an interesting addition of 1,250 pamphlets. A supplementary collection is being made to bring them up to date, and bids fair to outdo them, at least in point of number, seeing that already it has reached a total of 3,159 volumes and pamphlets. Added to the former figures we get the large total of 8,590, to which additions are being made nearly every day.

The 'William Blades' Library is the result of a life spent in assiduously collecting everything relating to its special subject. Wm. Blades began his task while still an apprentice and continued it to the end of his life. We have known men to make a tolerable collection on one subject, then leave it and start another. But this was not the case with Blades; he loved his subject and endeavoured to complete his collection as far as possible. The starting-point

of his enthusiasm was William Caxton. As a printer he was naturally interested in the man who first brought the art to England, and consequently sought information regarding him in all directions. Apparently he was disappointed with the results of his searches, as, indeed, he was justified in being, and with praiseworthy zeal engaged in a scientific scheme of research with a view of giving to the world a trustworthy and exhaustive memoir of our earliest printer. For years he gathered works on English and Continental printing, and as he pursued his studies, by-paths for future research were opened up to him, and in this way a useful working library was made. There are few real 'show' books—if Blades bought a book it was a book to be used, a necessary unit in the building up of a perfect whole—and thus works of little utility, no matter how great their attractions for 'collectors,' are conspicuous by their absence.

Biographies of printers and records of printing in towns, states or countries were Mr. Blades's delight, and he acquired them whenever possible. Of the literature on the mystery surrounding the invention of printing he had nearly everything, and the use he made of his books is shown in the paper read before the Library Association, entitled, 'On the Present Aspect of the Question—Who was the Inventor of Printing?' (1887). Although the one great authority on Caxton, his library contained no work from his press. In 1870 he wrote a little book called 'How to tell a Caxton,' and at the end of the preface is a notice beginning, 'Mr. Blades does not purchase Caxtons.' In another place he

said he was 'only a poor printer,' and could not afford to do so. There are a number of fragments, however, showing several of the types used by Caxton, and there are also all the reproductions, in facsimile and otherwise, which have been published from time to time. Mr. Blades secured most of the earliest English books on printing—a good copy of Moxon's 'Mechanick Exercises' in its original wrappers he obtained for the absurd sum of six shillings—there is also a copy of the scarce 'Regulae trium ordinum literarum typographicarum,' by the same author, 1676, and Atkyns' rare tract on the 'Original and Growth of Printing,' 1664, with the plate. Old John Lewis's 'Life of Mayster Wyllyam Caxton, of the Weald of Kent,' seldom met with now, is carefully preserved in a special case, enriched with fragments from Caxton's press, and other matter of a like nature. Each edition of Ames is present, and in fact every book of any importance on English printing may here be found.

While Blades was not able to aspire to 'Caxtons' he managed to adorn his library with some forty or fifty 'fifteeners.' True, there is nothing of striking rarity among them, but they include some remarkably fine examples of typography, which was more to his purpose. An Aretinus ('De bello italico,' 1471) from the press of Jenson, looks as fresh and bright as though only just issued, and the same may be said of a copy of the 'Decisiones nouae rotae Romanae,' 1477, printed at Mainz by Peter Schoeffer.

The early English press is represented by eighty books, etc., printed before 1640, by such printers as

Berthelet, Rastell, Whitchurch, Grafton, Jugge, East, Wyer, Short, Middleton, Marshe and Day. Among the Americana is a copy of Cicero's 'Cato Major' from the office of Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, 1744, which, in the sale catalogue of Mr. Henry Stevens's Franklin collection is quoted as specially rare.

An unique section of the 'William Blades' Library is the collection of pamphlets. As has been before stated, they number 1,250, and each one is neatly cased in a stiff marbled-paper cover, on the outside of which is a label containing a short title of the work in Blades's own handwriting. These are all arranged in sizes, and from six to twelve of them, according to thickness, are kept in a green cloth case, suitably lettered on the back. A more interesting collection could scarcely be imagined; here is a memoir of a noted printer, there a history of printing in some town, then we come across a little piece from the press of Wynken de Worde, and so we go on, each case containing some little surprise. As in human nature it seems usual to think more kindly of small things, so do we seem to appreciate these tiny treatises more than the statelier volumes that stand in the adjoining case. The latter impress us with their magnificence, but the pamphlets appeal to us by their very unpretentiousness.

A reprehensible practice of Blades's was that of 'making books,' *i.e.*, taking a portion of a work and giving it a new title. One conspicuous case of this was a book with the following title: 'An account of some early printed English books in

the library of the Earl Spencer: being a portion of the *Bibliotheca Spenceriana*. By T. F. Dibdin, M.A., London, 1825.' This remained a puzzle for some time, until it was discovered that it really was a portion of the '*Bibliotheca Spenceriana*,' with a special title-page in two colours printed for it! There are a few other things of a similar character, but none so remarkable as this.

William Blades died in April, 1890. He left behind him a reputation for uprightness, industry, and learning, as well as for an unswerving devotion to an important line of research. His literary works form a memorial not unworthy of him, and after them deserves to be named his Library. In the winter of the year that he died it was announced that his books would probably be sold in the following spring. The present Chairman of the St. Bride Foundation—Mr. C. J. Drummond—thereupon wrote to one of the executors—Mr. A. F. Blades—proposing that the Library should be kept intact in view of its possible purchase by the Governors of the Foundation, a body which, although its formation was then authorized, had not been elected. Mr. A. F. Blades replied that the executors would be pleased if the proposal could be carried out. An expert was employed to value the books, which he estimated at £975. Of this amount the Governing Body provided £500, and the remainder was raised from outside sources. In the preparation of the designs for the building of the Institute suitable provision was made for placing the collection in a separate fire-proof room, to be called '*The William Blades Library*.' A

medallion portrait of Blades adorns the wall space over the door of the Library.

While the late Talbot Baines Reed was devoted to the same subject as William Blades, he regarded it from a somewhat different standpoint, with the result that the two collections vary a good deal. The line of distinction is perhaps rather fine, but Blades's collection might be termed a 'biographical history of printing,' while Reed's is more a 'typographical' history. Mr. Blades was interested in the printers, Mr. Reed in the types they used; and this is only natural, when it is remembered that Blades was professionally a printer, and Reed professionally a type-founder.

Talbot Baines Reed was a son of Sir Charles Reed, head of a very old established firm of type-founders in the City, and his enthusiasm for the antiquities of printing was largely due to the great Caxton Exhibition of 1877. His principal interest was in tracing the development of English types and typemaking, and the results of his researches with this aim were published in a volume entitled 'A History of the Old English Letter Foundries, with Notes, Historical and Bibliographical, on the Rise and Progress of English Typography.' 4to. 1887. It must not be supposed, however, that his investigations here reached their culminating point, as, prefixed to the above-mentioned work, is an introductory chapter on the types and typefounding of the first printers, in which he discusses the various accounts of the Invention of Printing from a letter-founder's point of

view; and he maintained an interest in foreign typography all through.

Very few specimen sheets have come down to us from the early days of printing, and to supply their place Reed surrounded himself with a collection of productions from all the most important presses, more especially of those which have introduced new fashions in type faces. In this way books from the presses of Sweynheym and Pannartz, Anthony Koburger, the 'R' Printer, Erhard Ratdolt, John Mentelin, the Hoernen, Gerard Leeu, and John of Westphalia, amongst other fifteenth century printers, are preserved. Among these incunabula is a copy of Statham's 'Abridgments' down to the end of Henry VI., printed by Guillaume le Tailleur of Rouen for Pynson. There is nothing remarkable in the volume itself, but on the first few blank leaves is an Index, in Pynson's own handwriting, with his signature at the end.

Reed also gathered a fair number of examples of early English typography, which, together with those in the Blades Library make a goodly array. Reed greatly enhanced the value of his books by the notes he made in them. A large proportion of them contain extremely interesting remarks on the type, the printer, or the particular book itself, for which many future bibliographers will gratefully bless his memory. Reed was also something of an authority on Baskerville, and besides possessing a tolerable amount of information respecting him, the collection contains several beautiful specimens from his press, including both folio Bibles, 'Para-

dise Lost,' 'Paradise Regained,' and the 'Virgil.' There are also several fine examples from the press of that now little appreciated printer, Bodoni of Parma, one of them being the Greek Iliad in three large folio volumes.

It may possibly be news to some to hear that the type used by William Morris was cast at the foundry of Sir Charles Reed and Sons; relative to this, Reed made the following note in his copy of the first Kelmscott edition of the 'Story of the Glittering Plain':

'The types for this work were cast at the Fann Street Foundry from matrices produced from punches cut by French under Mr. Morris's personal inspection and from his designs. The letters were modelled chiefly on those of Jenson and the early Venetian roman printers.'—T. B. REED.

Inserted in this same precious little volume is a letter from Morris to Reed, and another from Mr. Emery Walker to him, in which Mr. Walker states that the rush for copies of the 'Glittering Plain' had been so great, that Morris himself was willing to pay £3 each for as many as he could get, the published price having been two guineas. Another Morris relic is a quarto volume of enlarged photographs of various early letterings, which were used as models.

The collection of typefounders' specimen books, together with those in the Blades Library and the later additions in the Passmore Edwards Library is doubtless the largest and most complete extant. They range from the earliest times to the very latest, and include some exceptionally rare examples,

a notable one being the first sheet issued by the first Caslon in 1734. Only three copies of this are known. Strenuous efforts are being made to perfect this section as far as possible, as it is felt it will form an important factor in future typographical history.

Reed's Library, or rather that portion which appertained to the Typographical Arts, was acquired by the Governors of the St. Bride Foundation in July, 1900, with money provided for the purpose by Mr. Passmore Edwards.

The Libraries, shelved in the Institute situated in Bride Lane, Fleet Street, E.C., are open every day from 10 a.m. till 8 p.m. (Saturdays excepted), and are free to all *bond fide* students. A classified catalogue of the whole collection is in course of preparation.

W. B. THORNE.